

Section 1: Introduction and Planning Process

Wildfires are a part of the natural ecological cycle of forest ecosystems. However, as humans encroach onto forested lands, the risk of catastrophic disaster increases. These areas of risk are known as the wildland/urban interface. They can be sharp geographical edges or zones of ever increasing risk potential. Regardless, they pose a threat to human life and property. The National Fire Plan calls for reducing this risk through a variety of measures including the creation of local wildland/urban interface fire mitigation programs. Custer County Emergency Services received a grant through the High Country Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) to prepare the Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan that documents programmatic goals, identifies implementing actions, and sets priorities for reducing wildfire risk.

Wildfire Hazard Mitigation

Wildfire hazard mitigation is the development and implementation of activities designed to reduce or eliminate losses resulting from wildfires. Wildfire mitigation can be used in conjunction with other county plans, including the County Comprehensive Land Use and Emergency Operations Plans.

The Custer County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan, hereafter referred to as the Plan, addresses privately held unincorporated urban and rural areas of the county and their interface points with Federal or State Lands such as the Salmon Challis National Forest, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. While this Plan does not establish requirements for the cities in the county or the Federal or State held lands, it does provide them with a framework for planning for common impacts from wildfires. The resources and background information in the plan is applicable countywide, and the goals and recommendations lay groundwork for local mitigation plans and partnerships.

All mitigation is local, and the primary responsibility for development and implementation of risk reduction strategies and policies lies with local jurisdictions. Local jurisdictions, however, are not alone. Partners and resources exist at the state and federal levels. No plan is complete until it is implemented. This Plan describes prescriptive programmatic actions that will bring about mitigation. These mitigation actions, if implemented over the next several years, will help reduce the damages caused by wildfire in the wildland/urban interface. However, it is up to the community to ensure that these actions are taken.

The Plan, and Appendices that follow, are the culmination of six months of work conducted by the Custer County Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Interagency Planning Group and includes a variety of measures designed to reduce the impact of wildfires.

Background

Each County within the state has been requested to write a simple Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Plan. These plans are to contain at least the following five elements:

- 1) Documentation of the process used to develop the mitigation plan. How the plan was developed, who was involved and how the public was involved.
- 2) A risk assessment to identify vulnerabilities to wildfire in the wildland urban interface (WUI).
- 3) A prioritized mitigation strategy that addresses each of the risks. Examples of these strategies could be:
 - ☐ Training for fire departments
 - ☐ Public education
 - ☐ Hazardous fuel treatments

- ☐ Equipment
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Additional planning
- ☐ New facilities
- ☐ Infrastructure improvements
- ☐ Code and/or ordinance revision
- ☐ Volunteer efforts
- ☐ Evacuation plans, etc.

4) A process for maintenance of the plan, which includes monitoring, and evaluation of mitigation activities.

5) Documentation that the plan has been formally adopted by the involved agencies.

To develop wildfire mitigation plans it is suggested that each county bring together the following individuals, as appropriate for each county, to make up the County Wildland/Urban Fire Interagency Planning Group. It is important that this group has representation from agencies with wildfire suppression responsibilities:

- ☐ County Commissioners (Lead)
- ☐ Local Fire Chiefs
- ☐ Idaho Department of Lands representative
- ☐ USDA Forest Service representative
- ☐ USDI Bureau of Land Management representative
- ☐ US Fish and Wildlife representative
- ☐ Bureau of Indian Affairs
- ☐ Local Tribal leaders
- ☐ Bureau of Disaster Services
- ☐ LEPC Chairperson
- ☐ Resource Conservation and Development representative
- ☐ State Fish and Game representative
- ☐ Interested citizens and community leaders as appropriate
- ☐ Other officials as appropriate

The planning group, with critical input from homeowners and the general public, will determine where the risks and vulnerabilities to wildland/urban fire are within the County and what mitigation actions are required. County organizations that include most of the identified representatives are already in place in Custer County.

In Custer County existing assessments and planning documentation has fulfilled many of the recommendations made above, however, the purpose of this planning activity is to integrate existing relevant information into a single place and to develop a strategic pathway to fire mitigation implementation.

Project Requirements

The Plan is being written to establish the jurisdiction's commitment to reduce risks from disasters and technological hazards, and serve as a guide for decision-makers as they commit resources to reduce the effects of wildfires upon private property within the designated wildland/urban interface areas.

The project has been outlined and conducted in accordance with the request from the State of Idaho Division of Emergency Management and cover the following format.

1. Develop and Document Planning Process
2. Assess the Risk
3. Develop Mitigation Strategies
4. Develop a Maintenance Process for the Plan

Planning Methodology

Information contained in the Plan is based on research and information taken from a variety of sources. The intention of the planning team is to not duplicate existing information, but rather to integrate resources provided by members of the planning committee.

The Interagency Planning Group is comprised of the following.

Name	Representing
Cliff Hansen	Custer County Commissioner
Lin Hintze	Custer County Commissioner
Wayne Butts	Custer County Commissioner
Jim Alexander	Custer County Disaster Coordinator
Ken Day	Mackay Fire Asst. Chief, City Foreman
Randy Ivie	City of Mackay Fire Chief
Will Marcroft	US Forest Service Lost River FMO
Wiley Smith	South Custer Board Chairman
John Fowler	USFS – South Zone Fuels Spec
Bill Baer	Challis BLM
Fritz Cluff	Salmon BLM
Launna Gunderson	Challis Fire
Andy Gunderson	Sawtooth Valley Rural Fire Department
Dave Kimpton	Iron Creek Home Owners Association
Rochelle Ahrens	Sawtooth N.F. Prevention
Michelle Erdie	North Zone Fire Prevention Technician Sawtooth N.F.
Wes Jones	ERS Project Manager
Rick Fawcett	ERS – Senior Consultant

Meetings

Three planning meetings were conducted to gather information and develop natural hazard actions for this plan. Additional meetings will be held with the County Commission, homeowners and the general public during the month of January.

Date	Group	Purpose
11/20/03	Mackay Fire, BLM, USFS	Project Introduction and Strategy Meeting
12/5/03	Challis	Project Introduction and Strategy Meeting
12/11/2003	Stanley	Project Introduction and Strategy Meeting
11/15-16/04	County Commissioners	Preparatory session for Public Meeting and project status update.
11/15-16/04	Public Meetings	Mackay, Challis, Stanley
2/6/04	Final Planning Meeting	Review Plan – Submit to Commissioners

Public Participation

Public participation process is being conducted in four specific ways.

- ❑ Examine the High County RC&D and the SNRA fire prevention related activities previously within the county. The Interagency Planning Group has been provided summaries of the public involvement and resulting recommendations.
- ❑ Ensure ongoing involvement of private homeowners and or representatives from the communities served by this process on the planning committees. Representatives have been, and will be in the future, invited to participate as members of the Interagency Planning Group.
- ❑ Notification by mail of Custer County property owners who live outside of the county, announcing the development of the plan, the availability and opportunity to review the plan online, and inviting them to make comments on the plan, and requesting them to complete a brief questionnaire (See Appendix 4).
- ❑ Conduct of three public meetings for the residents in Mackay, Challis, and Stanley. The purpose of these meetings is to provide a briefing to private property owners and the general public on planning activities to date, to solicit and receive their input, and to discuss implementation alternatives.

Mitigation Alternatives

Mitigation alternatives and resulting implementing actions have been developed for each goal area. In some instances the implementing action may simply require more study to clarify information or to solicit additional public input. All mitigation alternatives will be analyzed for cost benefit where possible. The resulting benefits will be summarized and provided as part of the final alternative descriptions.

The Five Year (*implementation*) Action Plan resulting from this effort is the most important product that will be developed by this process. The Five Year Action Plan contained in Section 4 identifies who is responsible for implementation of the action, what resources are required for implementation, and when the implementation is expected to be complete.

Plan Contents

Each section of the Plan provides important information and resources to assist in understanding the county and the issues facing citizens, businesses, and the emergency response community. Combined, the sections of the Plan work together to create a document that guides the mitigation mission to reduce risk and prevent loss from future wildfires.

The Plan is structured for ease of use and updating. Individuals interested in specific sections of the Plan will find the tabular format easy to negotiate and reference. The ability to update individual sections of the Plan places less financial burden on the county. Decision-makers can allocate funding and staff resources to review and update selected sections, thereby avoiding a full update, which can be costly and time-consuming. New data can be easily incorporated, resulting in an evolving mitigation plan that remains current and relevant to Custer County.

The Plan is organized as follows:

1. **Executive Summary and Five-Year Action Plan** - Provides an overview of the mitigation plan and a succinct listing of all implementing actions.
2. **Section 1: Introduction and Planning Process** - Describes Mitigation Planning Requirements and the Planning Methodology undertaken.

3. **Section 2: Custer County Idaho** - Presents a brief overview of Custer County, the Fire Districts within Custer County and related Federal agencies responsibilities, and the cost associated with fire suppression in Custer County.
4. **Section 3: Risk Assessment** - Provides hazard identification, vulnerability and risk analysis associated with wildfires in Custer County.
5. **Section 4: Public Participation** – Provides an overview of public involvement and documents public input into the planning process.
6. **Section 5: Hazard Mitigation Action Items** - Provides implementing actions developed to address the identified hazards and vulnerabilities.
7. **Section 6: Economic Analysis** – Provides an overview of the Benefit/Cost Analysis process.
8. **Section 7: Plan Maintenance** - Provides guidance on plan implementation, evaluation and maintenance.

Plan Adoption

The Custer County Board of County Commissioners is responsible for adopting the Plan. Once the Plan has been adopted, the County Disaster Coordinator is responsible for submitting it to the State Hazard Mitigation Officer at the Idaho Division of Emergency Management who will then submit the plan to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for review. This review will assess how the plan meets the federal criteria outlined in FEMA Interim Final Rule 44 CFR Part 201. Upon acceptance by FEMA, Custer County will gain eligibility for Wildfire Mitigation Grant Program funds. A formal Plan adoption form is included as the first page of the Plan.

Coordinating Body

The Custer County Wildland/Urban Interagency Planning Group has been responsible for coordinating development of the implementing Five Year Action Plan and has undertaken the formal review process. The County Commissioners will assign appropriate members of the Wildland/Urban Interagency Planning Group, private property owners, and representatives of resource providing agencies to form the Wildland/Urban Mitigation Advisory Committee to implement, evaluate and conduct the annual review of the plan. The Advisory Committee will meet at least quarterly to continue to examine opportunities to implement specific mitigation actions and to take and evaluate the implementation process.

Subcommittees may be formed under the direction of the Advisory Committee, to further evaluate actions as established and categorized in Section 5. Recommendations will then be made as to specific implementation processes including acquisition of funding and other necessary resources.

Implementation through Existing Programs

The Plan provides a series of recommendations – many of which are closely related to the goals and objectives of existing planning programs. Custer County will have the opportunity to implement recommended mitigation action items through existing programs and procedures.

Upon adoption of the initial Plan, the county will continue developing their natural hazard mitigation goals and actions using this document as a baseline of information on the wildfires that impact the county. Within six months of formal adoption of the Plan, the newly formed and appointed Wildland/Urban Mitigation Advisory Committee will review the recommendations listed. This committee will continue to

evaluate the feasibility of each strategy, determine the current status, readjust the priorities as necessary, and monitor the progress for implementation.